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*Evaluating
Twelfth-Grade
Themes*

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Evaluating Twelfth-Grade Themes

Sponsorship and Participation

The officers of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English, at their meeting in March, 1952, approved a study of current standards in evaluating compositions written by students in the ninth and twelfth grades. Later, Professor Gordon N. Ray, Head of the Department of English at the University of Illinois, agreed that the Department would serve as co-sponsor of the study. High-school and college teachers from all sections of Illinois eagerly agreed to share in the work.

The committee guiding the study has consisted of Miss Betty Woller, Champaign High School, who is familiar with both ninth- and twelfth-grade classes; Professor Charles W. Roberts, Director of Freshman Rhetoric at the University of Illinois, who formerly taught in high school; and, as chairman, Professor J. N. Hook, editor of the *Bulletin*, who also has had high school experience.

Twelfth-grade teachers who made part of the evaluations and prepared some of the comments printed in this *Bulletin* are:

Adele Armstrong, Bushnell
Patricia Bard, Kenney
Ellen Burkhart, Benton
Bertha Cline, Marion
Louise Fort, Clinton
Alma M. Hoppe, Rochelle
Helen Heath, Mattoon
Norval Henn, Evanston
Addie Hochstrasser, Paris
Faye Homrighous, Streator
Phyllis Hood, Olney

Isabel Hoover, Macomb
Louise Lane, Aurora
Emma Mae Leonhard, Jackson-
ville
Della Marlin, Fairfield
Mary Miller, Danville
S. Isabelle Sanders, Ottawa
Hila Stone, Robinson
Mina Terry, Petersburg
Tony Venegoni, Herrin
Mrs. O. C. Winters, Hutsonville

College teachers who also made evaluations and prepared comments are:

Robert Lee Blair, Eastern Illinois State College, Charleston
C. Hobart Edgren, Elmhurst College, Elmhurst
John L. Johnson, Knox College, Galesburg
A. J. Katauskas, Bradley University, Peoria
Ruth Maxwell, James Millikin University, Decatur
D. Parkander, Augustana College, Rock Island
Sister Mary Richard, B.V.M., Mundelein College, Chicago
C. W. Roberts, University of Illinois, Urbana
Ethel Seybold, Illinois College, Jacksonville
Harriet Stoddard, Blackburn College, Carlinville
R. E. Streeter, University of Chicago, Chicago
Philip H. Vitale, DePaul University, Chicago
Henry Wilson, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale
Lela Winegarner, Illinois State Normal University, Normal

A related study, devoted to ninth-grade themes evaluated by other teachers, appears in the March, 1953, *Bulletin*.

Purpose of the Study

One of the responsibilities of a teacher of English is to evaluate compositions—to weigh and find what is wanting, to attach a symbol that tells the student that his work is good or poor, to write a comment that will help the student to improve his future writing in some way. If students are to become better writers, they must write, and what they write must be judged by a sympathetic and competent critic who knows what good writing is and who knows what students' capabilities are.

Here is a teacher. Here is a theme, one of many in the stack. On the paper are scratchings of black or blue, a few smudges, an erasure, a word crossed out; on this paper is the evidence of a groping attempt to convey a group of related facts, an idea or an opinion, a picture, an emotion, or a story from one mind to another. What the teacher does to that groping attempt will help to determine how successful the student will be in future communication.

Marking the paper is not easy. The misspellings, the faulty punctuation and capitalization, and the gross errors in sentence structure or usage are not difficult to spot; indeed, they may be so conspicuous that the teacher becomes engrossed in marking them and overlooks other significant matters. And on the next theme, which is free of mechanical errors, the teacher, out of sheer

relief, may happily write an *A* and a *Good* even though the content and organization are poor.

What are the principles that an able teacher applies in evaluating a composition? Relatively what weight does the teacher give to content, straight thinking, organization, sentence structure, grammatical usage, diction, and mechanical matters such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling? Must the *A* paper be strong in all these respects, or may it be weak in some and exceptionally strong in others? Is the *E* paper faulty in almost everything, or is it very poor in only one or two ways? What is an "average" paper?

How much do standards rise from the ninth grade to the twelfth? What qualities may be virtually ignored in a freshman paper but stressed in a senior paper?

How closely related are the evaluations made by experienced teachers of high school seniors and those made by experienced teachers of college freshmen? Do experienced high school and college teachers stress the same principles in their evaluations? Are college standards distinctly much higher than high school standards?

It was the purpose of the study to search for at least partial answers—indirect answers, perhaps—to some or all of these questions. The sponsors believe that many teachers of English will welcome and find profitable the publication of representative ninth- and twelfth-grade themes, together with evaluations and comments by experienced teachers. Young teachers may profit particularly, but older teachers may be interested in seeing whether they are in step with other teachers with experience. The sponsors believe also that students may profit from seeing the kind of analysis that is applied to their writing. Finally, and possibly most important, the sponsors believe that careful study of the evaluations may lead English teachers in the direction of a probably desirable uniformity of standards. Some evidence indicates that at present a paper marked *A* in one school would be marked *C*, *D*, or *E* in others.

Procedure

In April, 1952, the steering committee asked district leaders of the Association to assist in gathering complete sets of themes written outside of class in April or May by twelfth-grade students in schools in various parts of the state. No specifications concerning length or subject matter were made. The themes were to be the results of a regular assignment, and were to be submitted exactly as written by the students, with no corrections or marks of any sort.

The committee also asked district leaders to suggest names of able twelfth-grade teachers to serve as evaluators of the themes. The teachers listed above as participants were chosen from those nominated by the district leaders. The committee asked the director of freshman composition in each of a number of representative Illinois colleges and universities to serve as an evaluator or to name someone to serve in that capacity. The college teachers named among the participants were chosen in this way.

From approximately four hundred twelfth-grade themes submitted, the committee chose twenty which seemed to reflect the whole range of writing ability from best to worst. Some of the themes were chosen because they were representative of specific problems in mechanics, organization, etc. that appeared in the larger group.

The twenty themes, now printed in this *Bulletin*, were mimeographed and given to the thirty-five evaluators at a meeting in Urbana on October 3, 1952. The mimeographed themes were arranged haphazardly, not in the poorest-to-best order in which they are printed. The original order was 14, 1, 13, 12, 3, 15, 9, 5, 20, 17, 8, 18, 2, 19, 6, 7, 11, 4, 10, 16.

Each evaluator was given a copy of the form below to be filled in for each theme:

I. A. T. E. THEME-EVALUATION PROJECT COMMENT SHEET

1. Title of theme:
2. Check list (Please check *good*, *fair*, or *poor* for every item.)

	<i>Good</i>	<i>Fair</i>	<i>Poor</i>
Quality of content
Originality of treatment
Unity
Coherence
Emphasis
Paragraphing
Diction
Grammatical usage
Sentence structure
Spelling
Punctuation
3. Please write *to the student* the comments that you think would be most helpful:
4. Please write *for teachers* any additional comment that will help them in assisting students whose writing is comparable to that in this theme:
5. In one of your own classes what grade (A B C D or E) should you give this theme? Circle *one* grade. Do not add plus or minus signs.

(College instructors will use their September standards for entering freshmen.)

Although nearly all teachers would write marginal comments or corrections in addition to the comment at the end, these comments were not asked for, because they could not very readily have been printed in this *Bulletin*.

When the evaluation sheets were returned, the committee compiled the results and chose the most representative, most helpful, and most penetrating comments for publication.

Ways of Using This Pamphlet

The committee believes that this issue of the *Bulletin* may be used both by teachers and by students of the twelfth and possibly the eleventh grades.

The committee recommends that the teacher of a twelfth-grade class should read the following themes in no definite order. Before looking at the grade and comment after each theme, the teacher should read the theme, identify its strong and weak points, and decide what grade he would give it if it were written by a student in his school. Then he should compare his evaluation with that which follows the theme. Admittedly the task of grading when one does not know all the circumstances is difficult, because in one's own school the type of assignment, the instruction previously given, and various personal factors enter into the determination of a grade. But the fact remains that there is a difference between good writing and bad writing, and that a teacher is here afforded an opportunity to match his judgment with that of thirty-five other evaluators, discovering whether his grades are usually higher or lower than theirs, and noticing whether he finds the same strong and weak points.

Some teachers may wish also to use the themes as a composition scale, by which their own students' writing may be measured. It is mainly because of this possible kind of use that the themes have been arranged from poorest to best.

The committee further recommends that sufficient copies of this issue be obtained to be used by twelfth- or possibly eleventh-grade students in the classroom. The students may compare the themes and learn that there is a clearly demonstrable difference between the quality of an E theme and that of a C theme, or between a C and an A. In addition, themes that are rated "Good" in certain categories may be studied at appropriate times so that students will learn, for instance, just what good unity or good paragraphing is.

In order that as many students as possible may profit from the study, the Association is making the issue available in quantity orders at less than cost. The price for each order of ten or more copies is fifteen cents a copy.

A Note on the Grading

As the letter system (A, B, C, D, E) is apparently the most widely used in Illinois secondary schools, evaluators were asked to employ that system. In schools employing any other system, the grades may be translated thus: E represents failing work; D, poor but passing; C, average; B, somewhat better than average; A, superior.

It will be seen that in grading some of the themes the evaluators were not in close agreement. The reason is that there are individual differences among teachers just as there are among students. A particular defect in a theme may be so obnoxious to one teacher that he lowers the grade, but another teacher may be less horrified by that error and more impressed by a good characteristic; the grades given by these two teachers may be two or even three letters apart.

Taken as a group, however, the evaluators tended to agree rather well concerning each theme. Only here and there was an evaluation far out of line with the consensus. Usually there was a concentration upon one grade, with a scattering of votes for the grade on each side of that one. If a theme was borderline, there was generally about an equal division between two grades. No one evaluator appeared to be consistently far above or far below the median in assigning grades.

It will be noted that the evaluations made by the college teachers coincide remarkably well with those made by the high school teachers. Both groups tended to give each theme approximately the same rank and to mark most of the same items in the check list. Taken as a whole, the college teachers graded each theme about one-third of a letter lower than did the high school teachers. Thus a theme graded B by nearly all high school teachers was likely to be graded B by most of the college teachers but graded C by a fair proportion of them. This closeness in grading by the two groups probably means that experienced teachers in both high school and college look for the same qualities in a theme. It suggests also that the rise in standards from the twelfth to the thirteenth grade is perhaps about the same as the rise in standards during each year of high school.

THEME 1: RIVERS

Did you ever stop to think what a river was? A river is used for many things such as a home for the beaver and fish. They supply us with natural beauty like the Mississippi River as illustrated by the colorful writer Mark Twain. They are used as a source of transportation and of course in the days gone by the river boat.

There are rivers other than the Mississippi, such as the Wabash, the Missouri, the Red river, the Rio-Grande, the Arkansas, and the Kishwaukee.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Poor	Poor
Originality of treatment	Poor	Poor
Unity	Poor	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor	Poor
Diction	Poor	Poor
Grammatical usage	Poor	Poor
Sentence structure	Poor	Poor
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: E (17 E, 4 D) ; median grade given by college teachers: E (14 E)

Comments to the Student

With a flood of material available to you, you have produced a very meager theme. Haven't you had any personal experience with rivers? Don't you fish or swim? Haven't you gone sailing, or rowing, or canoeing?

Do you know well any river in this area? If so, you might like to tell about seeing it at a certain time, or at some season of the year. Do you know the history of this river, or any stories about its past?

Develop the second, third, and fourth sentences of the first paragraph into three separate paragraphs, and you will have a theme.

Your use of specific details to establish your points is good. But your theme is "fuzzy" in purpose. When a theme is purposive and clear, all its paragraphs develop a single idea. What do you want your paragraphs to say about rivers? Make a sentence that contains the answer; then try writing paragraph topic sentences that develop your theme sentence. Develop one of these sentences in each paragraph.

Did you ever stop to think what an essay is? It is a chance to tell someone, sensibly and clearly, something which he may not know, or which he may not have thought of in just the way that you think of it. It is not just a series of casual, half-shaped observations flung down haphazardly on the paper. It is an attempt to communicate something of interest and importance, not just the churning out of one hundred words before Tuesday morning. If you think of essays as more than just busy-work, you will see why you must develop your points fully and connect them.

Comments to Teachers

This suggests to me that the writer just isn't capable of much connected thinking. Try putting something into the jug before you try to get much out. Work first for the ideas. The form will follow.

This student needs to be shown the beauty of the commonplace. Suggest that he narrow his subject and restrict his writing to the things with which he is acquainted.

This pupil needs to be aware of the importance of selecting one controlling idea. He does not know how to gather details to support an idea. Through the analysis of a simple but well-written model he can be shown the effect of unity and organization. He should first learn to write a well-rounded paragraph.

Talk over with the student how Mark Twain treats the Mississippi River in his writing. Show the student how Twain made the description rich in facts. The student may be interested in rivers and would enjoy the discovery of the River Series.

This theme reflects the need for more theme writing, writing that will excite the imagination and move the intellect to express ideas.

If the assigned topic was just "Rivers," then I feel rather sympathetic with this boy—I'm sure he's a boy—for he is probably the type that would rather be on a river than writing about "rivers." You will have to catch his interest before he will give any time of his own or voluntary consideration to writing a theme.

THEME 2: WHAT THE FIRE DEPT. DOES

The fire Department had a happy atmosphere because there was no fire in _____ at the moment. The firemen play cards in their spare time.

The _____ Fire Department is on _____ Street in _____ Illinois. The Fire Department is south from the square.

Coats and Boots are rubberized. The rubber overcoats, hats, and boots are ready for immediate use. The floor is kept clean.

The Fire Department has two fire trucks. The ladders, hoses, and bells are on the fire truck.

The Fire Department gets two or more false fire alarms on a pril fool's day. This is an old joke.

The firemen wear black uniforms. The firemen are between the ages of 35 and 60 years of age. Six men compose the fire Department squad.

The Fire Department keeps the fire from spreading to other buildings.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Poor	Poor
Originality of treatment	Poor	Poor
Unity	Poor	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor	Poor
Diction	Poor	Poor
Grammatical usage	Fair	Fair
Sentence structure	Poor	Poor
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: E (17 E, 4 D); by college teachers: E (14 E)

Comments to the Student

I wish you would make a list of the dozen or so facts concerning the fire department which appear in your essay. After you have your list, study it carefully, and see if some of the individual items belong together. For instance, do some of them deal with the firemen's equipment? Do some of them have to do with the department's purpose? With the firemen themselves? Now, can you take these groupings and use them to write a paper which will give a clearer picture than your present paper does of the way the fire department works?

Find out all you can about paragraphing. You have merely listed random facts, without thinking much about them and without organizing them in any way for any purpose. Considering your subject matter, you might have made an effort to get some vigor and excitement into your choice of words and more vivid descriptive detail into your sentences.

Try to use some complex sentences instead of so many short, choppy, simple ones. Try to vary the beginnings of the sentences

instead of starting with so many subject-verb combinations preceded by "the."

Comments to Teachers

This is a childish theme. Pupils should be taught that they must know something about a subject before they start to write about it. They also need to recognize matter that has no bearing on their topic.

This may represent a very great effort on the part of a very poor student. At least credit for the very few good points should be given, and special effort used to get the pupil to catch feeling, color, and some of the possible emotional reactions.

You will need to help such a student collect facts and outline them for some organization. Perhaps you should drill on capital letters.

In addition to the discussion of coherence and paragraphing that this paper calls for, it can also be used as the basis for a series of drills on sentence structure. Ask the student to take almost any two or three adjoining sentences, and see if he can incorporate them into a single sentence that is a bit less fourth-gradish than the constructions he uses here. Actually this approach via the sentence may assist the writer in doing something about his organizing of larger units, since this completely atomized structure suggests that he is reluctant to see any relationships among the facts, aside from his attributing the happy atmosphere of the fire department to the lack of work at the time of his visit.

THEME 3: MY TRIP TO THE NEWS OFFICE

When you went into the office you hear the low chatter of voices, the beating of the typewriters. Going from the secretary which received us at the door to the business manager of the News Office. We proceeded over to the teletype where we were greeted by the sports writer and he told us of the general run of the office. He told us where he got the material for the newspaper and that was most from the teletype machine. In turn the teletype gets its news from Chicago and New York offices. Also this machine can give you news from Korea three minutes after it happens. The news from this machine travels over to the linotype machine where it is put into lead slugs from there it goes to the man who constructs the pages on a rolling table called a "turtle." The page on the turtle is then rolled over to the hand press where the writings on the slugs are transferred to a rubber mat. The rubber mat is carried back to the press room where it is heated for one to three

minutes. Then from there the mat is placed in a mold and on the back side about fifty to seventy-five pounds of very hot lead is poured in. When I say very hot I mean the temperature of this metal is about 6000° E. I can smell the odor of it now. It is no unusual odor just that of hot melting metal. In thirty seconds this plate is taken out put on a saw and sawed off to the right length. Then a man will take it carve out the humps along the edges and in between words. The pressman takes it puts it into water to let it cool some more and then places it on the press clamps it down and it is then ready to print the paper you read. Every page is done in this manner. At this news office the fewest amount of pages ever published was six and the most being forty-eight. This office employes thirty-four employees and about 20 to 24 really are the workers of the paper, the office opens at seven and closes at 3:30 and has about seventeen carriers on route. You are always welcome at this office.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Poor	Poor
Unity	Fair	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor	Poor
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Poor	Poor
Sentence structure	Poor	Poor
Spelling	Fair	Fair
Punctuation	Poor	Poor

Median grade given by high school teachers: E (11 E, 8 D, 2 C) ; by college teachers: E (9 E, 4 D, 1 C)

Comments to the Student

The theme shows that you learned a great deal from your visit. So that your report can be effective and easily understood, you must work at the problem of selecting, arranging, and shaping details. First of all, your exact purpose must be clear in your mind. Do you want to give an account of your trip? Do you want to tell us how news is assembled? Clarify your purpose first, because your purpose should tell you what to omit and what to include. Phrase your sentences so that their relation to your purpose is clear.

I am sure that you have noticed how the newspaper, when it prints the news, does so in such a way that readers know where to

look for what they are interested in. Sports stories, society items, financial news, and the comics are likely to be grouped together on pages of their own. This is a kind of organization, according to subject matter. Similarly, when you write of your visit to the newspaper office, you will help the reader if you organize your impressions into a few bigger units: the editorial room perhaps, the composing room, the stereotyping department, the pressroom. This will be much clearer than if you give the reader simply a play-by-play account of everything you saw.

Pronouns—Keep the same; you have you, we, I.

Commas—Find the rule for a series.

Verb tense—Keep the same time; don't switch needlessly from past to present.

Sentences—You have some run-on, and one fragmentary sentence.

Sentence fragments and run-on sentences are serious errors. Study all that your textbook has to say about them.

Comments to Teachers

Although in the comment to the student I would concentrate on the organizational chaos of the essay, it goes without saying that the teacher's problem here is staggering. Instruction in punctuation, for example, must begin at the ground floor, with the most rudimentary exercises, since the student does not even use commas to separate verbs in a series. His lack of sophistication in handling the sentence is equally evident; he commits sentence fragments and run-on sentences with facility. And yet a certain minimum sensitivity to diction, coupled with the patent honesty of his effort to describe what he saw, suggests that, if he can be shown the necessity of observing the fundamentals of syntax and punctuation, he can become an adequate writer. He is far from a hopeless case.

Mark all errors in a paper like this, but focus the student's attention on one weakness at a time. I'd start with the paragraphing here, because it might be mastered quickly. The development of sentence sense will take more time, but it must be achieved if the student is to be given a passing grade at the end of his first semester in college.

This student needs—besides a thorough review in grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation—practice in outlining, in both directions: outlines of short, simple readings, and outlines before writing.

THEME 4: WHERE FRIENDS MEET

Walgreen's, one of Illinois leading drug store's is located on the corner of and Street. As you walk into Walgreen's you notice the place is nice and clean, ready for a day's business. The first thing you notice is the soda fountain, in the center of the room is the record player. As we walk farther in we see the cash register along the north wall and on the east side is the cosmetics counter. Only one waitress is taking care of the business this morning. Then there is the cashier, who looks nice and clean this morning.

The customers' coming in this morning are mostly women, some of them housewife's, who have taken their husband's to work and stopped for a cup of coffee. The atmosphere in here this morning is very quiet, except for the low murmur of the women as they chat with one another. Everyone seems to be in a pleasant mood this morning. There is an occassional ringing of the cash register and the swishing of the door. The manger is taking care of the prescription counter and observing what goes on. It is very different now than what it will be at noon. As you sit at the counter you watch the waitress wash the glasses and make the coffee.

This drugstore is a very necessary asset to our community, because we go to the drug store to get our prescriptions for medicine filled and it is an excellent place to meet new friends.

Evaluation		
	High school	College
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Poor	Poor
Unity	Poor	Fair
Coherence	Poor	Fair
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Fair	Fair
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Poor	Poor
Sentence structure	Poor	Poor
Spelling	Poor	Poor
Punctuation	Poor	Poor

Median grade given by high school teachers : D (7 E, 10 D, 4 C) ; by college teachers : E (8 E, 4 D, 2 C)

Comments to the Student

In the last sentence you introduce a new topic. Whereas before you were stressing the fact that friends meet at the drugstore, you are now vaguely hinting that one can make new friends by going

there. Instead of describing the cold facilities of the store, you should build up a picture of a place where the atmosphere is friendly, the people are friendly, and the clerks are friendly.

Your shifting back and forth from second to first person is very disconcerting.

The "ringing of the cash register" and the "swishing of the door" and the "low murmur of women" are well chosen details. But both the store and the cashier are "nice and clean." Can you find more accurate words to distinguish the cleanness of the store from the cleanness of the cashier? The spelling and the punctuation need cleaning up, too. Study again the use of the apostrophe; don't overuse it.

Try reading this essay aloud. You will probably notice that you have accumulated a number of details concerning the store, but that these details do not come together into a full impression, except, to a limited extent, in the second paragraph.

Would it be better to use as your main idea the fact that Walgreen's is an asset to the community? You might then have a paragraph showing that we turn to Walgreen's for medicine and many other items. Another paragraph might let us see that the store provides a friendly gathering place. If you will think about your material, other ideas for writing a unified theme may occur to you.

Write nine sentences, three using the possessive singular form of customer, three using the nominative plural, and three using the possessive plural. Write nine more, in the same order, for housewife. Then write a last nine, using the noun husband.

Comments to Teachers

This is an example of many compositions filled with ordinary, commonplace details, given in a monotonous fashion. Perhaps training students to see the unusual would wean them from this practice, or training them to present the usual in a new way might result in a better theme.

Help the student to write a topic sentence and develop a paragraph. The writing of a good paragraph must inevitably precede the writing of a good longer composition. The student also needs drill on the formation of plurals and on the avoidance of shifts from one person to another.

Give the class as models some descriptive passages that have an impact.

Obviously, this writer needs schooling in the use of the apostrophe, in punctuation generally, and in sentence structure. But he

also is suffering from an inability to come to grips with reality; he is content with labeling things, instead of attempting to describe them with some particularity. This is evidenced in the first paragraph, not only by the repetition of the vague adjectives "nice and clean," but also by the fact that he is content simply to enumerate the things he sees in the drugstore. There is some improvement in the second paragraph, but even here he stays clear of the really specific: "The manger (sic) is taking care of the prescription counter and observing what goes on." Coupled with this high degree of generality, one notes a fondness for the copulative verb, which may be justified by the static quality of the scene, but which I suspect results from languor rather than intention.

THEME 5: WISE GUYS

Wise guys are to my estimation public enemies number one. Ever since I can remember there have been funny little characters, or so they think, who have taken great delight in pushing, shoving, and literally speaking, walking all over you.

In every crowd, in every school, in every town there are such persons, known as wise guys.

What they get out of being a smarty, I, myself, haven't found out. Maybe they want to "stand out" in the crowd, but one think certain most of the crowd would like to "kick them out."

They are the ones that, while you are sitting down manage to remove the chair, or if you are drinking water from a fountain turn the water on full blast so it gives your face a bath.

They also are the ones who "hot rod" around town, usually taking the lives of many innocent people.

Another one of their tricks is call and use "guess who" tactics on the phone.

I hope someday alot of these "wise guys" wake up to the fact, that most of us like just plain "nice guys."

Evaluation

	High school	College
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Poor	Fair
Unity	Fair	Fair
Coherence	Poor	Poor
Emphasis	Fair	Poor
Paragraphing	Poor	Poor
Diction	Poor	Poor
Grammatical usage	Fair	Fair
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair

Spelling	Fair	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: D (2 E, 10 D, 8 C, 1 B); by college teachers: D (5 E, 9 D)

Comments to the Student

Try using a simple outline to help you with your paragraphing. Such an outline for your theme might have had these three headings: (1) who the "wise guys" are; (2) what they do; (3) why they behave as they do. Then by grouping and arranging the right details under each topic, you would have given your theme a better organization. One good thing about your theme is its viewpoint. The reader is always certain that you dislike "wise guys."

You have made very clear your definition of "wise guys" by your well-chosen illustrations. However, you ought to rewrite this after you have reviewed the rules for constructing a paragraph.

This is a sincere treatment, but the composition is poorly organized. Paragraphs 4, 5, and 6 all belong together, following the sentence which constitutes paragraph 2. Paragraph 3 belongs with the last paragraph.

Your illustrations could be expanded.

It takes time and planning to write a good theme. You have a few good details, but in a very few minutes you should be able to think of some more. Then you need to decide what details belong together—surely trickery with a telephone is not so important as endangering people's lives. Why not use one good-sized paragraph for silly tricks and another for dangerous ones? Try this theme again.

I gather that you are not particularly fond of wise guys, that you think they are public enemies. When a lawyer prepares a case against a real public enemy, he follows certain forms so that his case will be entirely clear. So, even in an informal essay, you must follow certain conventional ways of doing things—in paragraphing and punctuation, for instance—if your case is to be entirely clear and convincing. In this essay, the reader would like to share fully your magnificent indignation directed at the wise guy, but he is constantly distracted and befuddled by such errors as your omission of commas. The result is that you don't get such a resounding "guilty" verdict as you want.

Comments to Teachers

This might be a good theme for the class to work on.

I should suggest that the student make first a numbered list of

all his ideas on the subject; then, combine those that seem to belong together; and finally, arrange the items.

This essay is pretty clear evidence that an efficient, though primitive, sense of organization may exist unaccompanied by skill in handling the mechanics of writing. Here the writer proceeds with a kind of naive clarity, defining his term, suggesting motivation, and enumerating examples of the term. And yet the total effect is of something below the threshold of acceptability, largely because of the grotesque punctuation and paragraphing. The writer's forthrightness suggests that he has a certain pride in his opinions; I would approach him from this side, showing how his ignorance of conventions in writing keeps him from being as persuasive and influential as he might be.

Here is a student who thinks for himself. Properly guided, he could have something very worth while to say.

THEME 6: KITCHEN

The kitchen is my favorite spot about meal time because there are so many interesting things going on. As I sat there waiting for supper, I could hear the meat frying in the skillet, the potatoes boiling, and the apple pie bubbling as it was taken from the oven. You can hear the different noises things make while cooking for a meal.

You can see how things cook. You can watch the water boil around the potatoes and wonder how it cooks them. You can see the meat fry and the grease pop out around it. You can watch the apple pie bake and think how good it is going to taste.

You can smell all the different ordors as they make you grow hungry. My, how good that apple pie smells and that meat would melt in your mouth. Yes, think of the butter you will put on your potatoes. My doesn't that smell good.

You can feel the heat from the oven and the moisture from the water the potatoes are cooking in. You can feel the grease that pops off the meat.

Now, that the food is done you can sit down to a delicious supper. My doesn't the potatoes with butter on them taste good. Oh! yes don't forget the meat. It is very delicious and doesn't that apple pie taste good. This supper would make anyones mouth water.

Just top and think of all the things you can see, hear, feel, smell, and taste in the kitchen when a meal is being prepared. The kitchen is a very nice place to go when you have an appetite.

Evaluation

	High school	College
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Poor	Poor
Unity	Fair	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Fair
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Fair	Fair
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Poor	Fair
Sentence structure	Fair	Poor
Spelling	Fair	Fair
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: D (2 E, 12 D, 6 C, 1 B) ; by college teachers: D (2 E, 10 D, 2 C)

Comments to the Student

If you had used your last paragraph as an introduction, your theme would have been more easily understood.

This is an interesting record of sense impressions. It would be much better if you actually described things, using colorful adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and figures of speech. You say that you see the meat frying, you hear the meat frying, but that is not enough. You must paint pictures, and create sound effects, etc. for the reader. Exclamations of delight on your part aren't enough.

Tense—Don't shift unnecessarily.

Repetition—You say the same thing—gets monotonous.

Vocabulary—Use some expressive adjectives and verbs. Stay in the kitchen for a half hour tonight and get some words of smell, sound, taste, etc.

Pronouns—Don't shift person unnecessarily.

You break your material into too many paragraphs. You might write one good paragraph developing the notion that the kitchen is a splendid spot to be while food is being prepared: You can watch. . . . You can hear. . . . etc. Then you might write another about how good it is to eat the meal.

Do you ever grow impatient with anyone who seems to keep telling you how you should feel about everything—about politics, or the latest movie, or a new song? Instead of giving you reasons for wanting you to feel as he does, he simply says, "Isn't it wonderful?" and then looks hurt if you don't agree. The reader of your paper may feel some of the same impatience. Without giving him reasons—that is, words conveying pictures, sounds, smells,

etc.—you urge him to agree with expressions like “My doesn’t that smell good.” He is likely to rebel.

Comments to Teachers

Saturate students in really good descriptive prose before you ask them to do assignments like this one.

This student will need help to see what is really wrong. He has tried hard to do everything he had been told to do to produce a good theme, but the effect is childish. He may never become a good writer, but he can be helped.

The student has, of course, made a serious attempt to organize his paper, but the sort of organization he has chosen (or has been given) causes disorganization in other respects. Perhaps the fault lies partly in a too rigid form of assignment.

THEME 7: “THE ROCKIES”

Almost everyone has five senses. These five senses are: seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling, and tasting. In general, these five senses are used most when the person is closest to nature. Maybe this is true because most people are used to being around things of man, like the cities. In all my travel, the heart of the Rockies, near Denver, is what I consider closest to nature.

Have you ever been in the Rocky Mountains or in any kind of big mountains? Well, if you haven’t, I can say very truthfully that you have missed something. Upon arriving at the Rockies, the first sense affected is sight. Your eye sight is very deceiving here because of the vastness of the mountains. For instance, maybe you look at a large mountain and say that it might be five miles away when really it is twenty, or maybe you start out to hike to the top of a small one and later find out it would have been a day’s walk.

Since the Rockies are so tall and up-standing, the echo can be heard almost anywhere. The echo of a car horn can be heard for miles. The roar of the wind through the pine trees and the roar of a mountain stream in a canyon are sounds I will never forget. Also the smell of the pine and fir trees, with the thin and pure air is something very worth while. At night, it freezes, thus making the air feel so cool and pure in the early morning. Sometimes the fog is so thick that the visibility is zero. When it gets near noon time the fog leaves and the sun shines very freely. Never have I tasted such delicious fried chicken in my life as that which I ate in the Rockies.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Poor	Fair
Unity	Poor	Poor
Coherence	Poor	Poor
Emphasis	Poor	Poor
Paragraphing	Fair	Poor
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Fair	Fair
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: D (11 D, 9 C, 1 B) ; by college teachers: D (2 E, 5 D, 7 C)

Comments to the Student

Try to make the reader see some scene or hear the echoes or feel the cool morning air. If you make your sentences stronger, some of the other difficulties will be taken care of.

Your theme is good in punctuation and spelling. You were less successful in holding my interest because you have put in material that does not seem to belong to your topic. Also I am not sure of what you mean by the parts I have underlined. Always check to see whether you are saying what you want to say and also whether it really belongs in your composition. For instance, is your eyesight deceiving or are distances deceptive because of the clear atmosphere?

You have tried so hard to use the five senses that you have over-emphasized them in the theme. I wouldn't mention them at all, but rather just use them to collect material for my theme.

Omit quotation marks around a title. Try not to state facts that are generally known, as you do in the first paragraph.

You show a keen awareness of the sense impression possibilities. Your sentences could be articulated a bit better. You make abrupt jumps from one idea to another—from fog to fried chicken, for example, with no logical or transitional connections. See what your text says about paragraph unity and coherence.

The Rockies are not a very promising subject for a theme dealing with the five senses, for they don't necessarily appeal to that many senses. Hence the introduction seems unrelated to the theme, and the reference to taste has to be dragged in, for chickens are probably no more appropriate to the Rockies than to the plains. The second paragraph and most of the third are well worked out and have good descriptive details.

Comments to Teachers

This is a forced exercise, with sense impressions dragged in without sense or sensibility. We hear a roar of wind, smell a pine, feel cool air, and taste fried chicken in quick succession, and to no point or purpose except to fulfill a given assignment. The teacher should be graded E for not putting good, natural models before the student. Give this student a taste of a passage from Bret Harte, for example.

This assignment, like that of "Kitchen," can be useful and provocative, but it has its dangers. The poorer student, particularly, is likely to take over the assignment pattern as a ready-made scheme for organization; then, unless he can manage his transitions with more dexterity than the poor student normally commands, the resulting organization is forced and distorted. We read irrelevancies, such as the first two sentences of this paper, and we see desperate attempts to round out the pattern, as in the final invocation of "delicious fried chicken" in the closing sentence.

Go over with the student several sentences of this paper helping him to improve them until he is clearly aware of what is wrong and what is needed to make them right.

THEME 8: A PLACE NO ONE CAN REACH

Where is this place no one can reach? Why naturally that's the top pantry shelf with the door that is forever sticking from the amateur paint job three summers ago. But lets go up anyway and see if we can find the massive cut glass punch bowl. The rickety ladder wobbles to and fro while we attempt to open the cupboard door. After many muscle strained pulls it opens with a lunge. What is in this seldom opened cupboard? There's the gorgeous old hand painted platter of great-grandmother's and look at the multitude of petite demitase cups. I don't see the bunch bowl but there sure are stacks of unmatched plates, imported glass coasters, rows of beautiful crystal clear cut glasses, and nic-nacs. Ah yes, here it is but a catastrophe has happened. There lays the antique cut glass bunch bowl that has been a family heirloom for so many years, shattered in a million different pieces.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Good	Fair
Originality of treatment	Fair	Fair
Unity	Good	Fair
Coherence	Good	Fair

Emphasis	Fair	Fair
Paragraphing	Fair	Fair
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Fair	Poor
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Fair	Fair
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: C (1 E, 6 D, 8 C, 6 B); by college teachers: C (3 E, 3 D, 7 C, 1 B)

Comments to the Student

Commas would help clarify meaning in several sentences. There's no real reason for the last sentence. Why was the punch bowl broken? How could it have been? Readers worry about such unanswered questions.

Your errors in grammar like "there lays," misspelled words like "nicnacs," lack of punctuation marks as indicated on your paper, and awkward sentences reduced my enjoyment of an otherwise delightful little theme. I was eager to know what you found on that top pantry shelf.

I am somewhat confused about your main purpose. Is it primarily to present the "place" as the title suggests, or to tell about the punch bowl as the last two sentences indicate?

Naturally is parenthetical. Apostrophe needed in lets. Is the door straining its muscles? Better: "After we have strained many muscles while pulling at the door. . . ." Contents of the cupboard should be the subject of a new paragraph. A statement and an exclamation should not be combined in one sentence. Note the two misspellings in the last half of the theme. Lays or lies? Why? Isn't different unnecessary?

What you need here is a main idea, one that will unify and direct the essay. This paper is somewhat confusing because you seem to get nowhere.

You may not have realized it, but the manner which you chose for the telling of your story is one of the most difficult kinds for a writer to handle successfully. The "let's-do-something" approach is very tricky, because unless it is used with great skill it sounds condescending, and then the reader thinks, "You go ahead and climb that ladder; I'll stay down here and watch television." Your use of the device does not quite work out; there's a touch of forced enthusiasm in such sentences as "What is in this seldom opened cupboard?"

The fact that you do reach the place contradicts your title.

Comments to Teachers

I should guess that this student writes easily and has never been told to take much time for written assignments. Chiefly she needs to learn that an assignment cannot be given a quick treatment in the few minutes before class.

Some students, like this one, rely too heavily upon artless simplicity and sham folksiness. They are likely to feel that they can attain an air of naturalness and casualness by using the pronoun "we," by casting transitional sentences in the form of questions, and by employing contractions and such expressions as "ah yes." The result here is an atmosphere of staginess and unreality more disturbing to the reader than would be the case if the writer had made no attempt to cuddle up to the reader.

This theme shows signs of verbal creativeness and is somewhat personal and individual. Details are effective.

THEME 9: THE THREE MOST BEAUTIFUL SPOTS ON THIS CONTINENT

Believe it or not, traveling can be fun. Before I saw some beautiful spots of nature, I thoroughly disliked traveling. I am going to tell you briefly about three spots on this continent that I think stand supreme. This is about a water-fall, a cave, and a garden.

I have seen Niagara Falls many times. The last time was when I was ten years old. Some of the people took a conducted tour of the inside of the falls to see it from both angles. At night, colored lights were flashed on the falls which made them take a colored effect. What a spot of beauty! I have often asked, "How could nature create anything so beautiful?" Close to Niagara Falls is the famous Horseshoe Falls. This too is very lovely.

Last summer I went to the Wisconsin All State Band Clinic held at Madison, Wisconsin. While I was there, we were conducted on a tour through the Cave of the Mounds. We saw the multi-colored stalactites and stalagmites. The wishing well, a fascinating place where wishes are made, was another item of interest.

However, my favorite spot is the Bellengrath Gardens near New Orleans, Louisiana. This garden was constructed by Mr. Bellengrath in honor of his wife. The chief factors of beauty are the over-hanging moss, the variety of flowers, and the manner in which the land forms a lovely garden.

To me, these are fine examples of the beauty of our continent. My only suggestion to you is to just travel and see nature for your-

self. You will then be able to draw your own conclusions as to what is the most beautiful, whether it be a water-fall, a cave, or a lovely garden.

Evaluation

	High school	College
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Fair	Poor
Unity	Fair	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Fair
Paragraphing	Good	Fair
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: C (4 D, 12 C, 5 B); by college teachers: C (1 E, 4 D, 9 C)

Comments to the Student

Your theme has a well-defined plan. You did not tell us enough, though, about any one of these spots so that we could share your feeling. For example, I too have visited Bellingrath Gardens (although I found them in Alabama), but from your paragraph I could not picture them. What did you see at the first glance? What were the most important details? What flowers were most colorful? What did the hanging moss remind you of?

Wouldn't you gain by appealing to both the eye and the ear? That is, can't you choose more specific words? Also, since the short, choppy sentences detract from the total effect, try combining some of them to make longer, more interesting ones.

It might be better to choose just one of the spots and really prove that it is beautiful, not just say so. What is your purpose in this theme—to show the advantages of travel, or to prove that these beauty spots are superior? The two are confused: the title suggests the second, the first paragraph both, the last paragraph the first.

Simply to say that a place is "lovely," "beautiful," "fascinating," etc. will get you and your reader nowhere. You need to record sense impressions and to give color, form, and life to the pictures. Weigh the use of adjectives and adverbs. Observe more closely and record more minutely. Your "variety of flowers" creates nothing but a blur in the reader's mind; something like "heavy-headed sunflowers" would create an image.

Comments to Teachers

This student needs direction in the writing of vivid description. Examine some examples of really good description before you put a class on such an assignment.

It might help this student's writing if he were set the task of describing, with precision and in some fullness, an individual object or scene. As it is, he tends to take his eye off the object and to substitute a gush of language for accuracy of statement. In descriptive writing this tendency to allow the language to run away with him may not be particularly serious, but I suspect that when he is dealing with less concrete subjects, the same tendency could lead to serious confusion, even in his own mind.

This theme shows a lack of sensitivity to effective detail and mood and feeling. The pupil should select from well-written paragraphs effective words which give pictures. The theme should be read aloud to show the short, choppy sentences. There should be remedial work on sentence building and vocabulary.

THEME 10: WHY I CONSIDER "THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US" A GREAT PIECE OF LITERATURE

What is a great piece of literature? Great writings have been found in all periods of literature. The Romantic Age brought a "return to the exuberance, the intensity, and mental independence of the Elizabethians." Surely a great Romantic work should exemplify these ideals, and what could express them more perfectly than William Wordsworth's sonnet, "The World is too Much With Us"? First of all, there is a return to the exuberance when he tells of the sea as she bares her bosom to the moon, of the howling winds, or perhaps imagine even old Proteus, or stately Triton rising from the sea and blowing his pearly horn. The intensity of thought is apparent throughout the entire sonnet; Wordsworth's excellent philosophy has been compiled in fourteen exquisite lines. Nothing said is hypocritical; it has not delved too deeply into the complex human mind. It is merely sage words of observance and wisdom. Nothing is said that is superfluous. Surely the mental independence is obvious. Is not Wordsworth's philosophy unique? . . . After all, he is considered to be the "high priest of nature." Has he a literary superior who writes with the same philosophy? He has not followed a pattern set by any of his predecessors. He has set his own pattern of mental independence.

	Evaluation	High school	College
Quality of content		Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment		Fair	Fair
Unity		Fair	Fair
Coherence		Fair	Poor
Emphasis		Fair	Fair
Paragraphing		Fair	Fair
Diction		Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage		Fair	Fair
Sentence structure		Fair	Fair
Spelling		Good	Good
Punctuation		Fair	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: C (4 D, 13 C, 2 B, 2 A) ; by college teachers: D (4 E, 4 D, 3 C, 2 B, 1 A)

Comments to the Student

How many ideas are in your theme? Then what should you do about paragraphing? A shorter title is usually preferable.

You have followed a definite plan in your theme and have presented in well-selected words three ideas about Wordsworth's poem. This is commendable. However, you should guard against assembling a mosaic of fragments from critical material which you have read without assimilating it thoroughly. It is much better to try to express your own honest opinions in your own words and with your own reasons.

Do you feel that you accomplished what you set out to do? You did not define what you consider "great literature." You side-stepped when you characterized the Romantic Age. You did convince me that the sonnet perhaps shows "exuberance," but from there on I was lost in a maze of words. What is really great about the poem? What shows its simplicity and its sincerity, two characteristics of great literature?

Your goal was to tell us why you consider this sonnet a great piece of literature. I feel that you have given us a critic's opinion rather than your own. Why do you think it is great? What has Wordsworth said to you that makes you feel it is great?

I'd like you to try a little experiment. Think of another sonnet by another Romantic poet, and then take this essay and see how many details and words you would have to change if you wanted this essay to fit the other poem. My guess is that you wouldn't have to make many changes. You see the trouble is that you are using language so loosely, both in your borrowing of the key words and in your interpretation of the poem, that no communication occurs. No relationship is established between the big general words and the reality of the poem.

Using the motto about exuberance, intensity, and independence is a good idea for starting the theme, and I can follow you pretty well through the exuberance, which you illustrate from the poem. But you neglect to tell us what it is in the poem that shows intensity, or where Wordsworth shows independence, or what it is that he shows independence of. And what philosophy appears in the poem?

Comments to Teachers

This student has been told to do something that he is not qualified to do; so he has done the next-best thing: hunted up an "authoritative statement" and tried to square the assignment with it. I would suggest that the teacher should give the student assignments which lie within his scope, instead of creating situations which virtually force him to use words irresponsibly.

In my opinion this is the least successful paper in the lot of twenty. In other papers which had to be graded down because of various failings in plan or execution, one could see the students groping to communicate something—some impression of rivers, newspaper office, or drugstore. One felt that the student, however fumbling in execution, had a toehold on reality. Here, however, the writer has cast off his moorings to reality. Handbook terms are using him, rather than he, them. This is not to say that this student may not become a much better writer than others in this group. Convince him that writing like this is nonsense, and he may be ready to begin learning.

The theme is mostly verbalism. Since the student is evidently not stupid, I assume that she (or he) learned somewhere that empty words are all that an English teacher cares about. That impression should be corrected! I suggest talking the poem over with the student, as well as the theme.

A better assignment would be "What the Poem X Means to Me."

The writer made the mistake of not answering "What is a great piece of literature?" and a further mistake of not applying the criteria (had he given them) to the sonnet. Students need to be taught to think straight. I realize that this is hard to do. But pin them down to explain the meaning of their high-sounding words.

THEME 11: THE CHILDREN TO LOVE

Last summer I had an unusual and gratifying experience. I was a counselor at a camp for underprivileged children at a lake near my home town. The first few days were hard ones for all of

us. We had to get acquainted with each other and with our camp, but after then our fun began.

Some of the cases were quite pitiful, and I was really shocked and quite disturbed when some of these kids couldn't keep down their food because they weren't used to eating good food three times a day.

Each counselor had a group of about ten children; I had a swell bunch of little girls who gave me a little bit of trouble and a lot of fun. All the kids bring their problems to their counselors and, believe me, we had some problems. We got some questions that we couldn't answer, but we tried to answer them anyway.

You get to know and love these kids when you are with them, and you always have a tear in your eye when they leave for their homes after two weeks of fun.

We had the most fun at night when we got together for singing and movies; they tried to get two good movies that the children would enjoy, one for each week. Each group of kids and their counselors planned an act for stunt night held once a week. The counselors also put on a show one night. Some of these kids showed great talent. If someone would only cultivate it they could become as good as anyone.

We also had swimming and boating which was a lot of fun for all of us. I taught a swimming class, and I found that these kids have the ability to learn if they only have the chance.

When one loves these children they don't know what to make of it at first, but after awhile, they learn to love, too, and they won't let their counselors out of their sight.

I sang to the kids in our cabin when the lights were out, and they always wanted me to sing the "Lord's Prayer" for the last song.

After the kids went to sleep, the counselors had meetings to discuss problems of the day and to dance and have some fun by themselves before they turned in. Our beds were usually filled with grass or short-sheeted, but that was true with everyone. One night we short-sheeted all the counselors' beds, and the racket was terrific as the whole camp was up at midnight making their beds over.

	Evaluation	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content		Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment		Fair	Fair
Unity		Fair	Fair
Coherence		Fair	Poor
Emphasis		Fair	Poor
Paraphrasing		Fair	Fair

Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Fair	Fair
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: C (5 D, 12 C, 2 B, 2 A); by college teachers: C (6 D, 6 C, 2 B)

Comments to the Student

I think you have two themes here, and you give us a paragraph of one, then a paragraph of the other. The one that you—and the reader—are most interested in is the one about the children; we should like to know more about them—where they came from, how they were dressed when they arrived, how they talked, how they developed as individuals. Perhaps you could follow one of the most interesting ones from arrival to departure and present her in a sort of short story. The other theme, about the counselors, is interesting, too, but it gets in the way.

If the head counselor asked you to write a report concerning one of the children in your group, how might you go about it? Mightn't you try to group your reactions in some sensible way which would help the head counselor understand the child? You might decide to use several classifications: the child's participation in activities, his achievement in mastering skills and games, his adjustment to other campers. Similarly, this essay would have much more value if you had a clear plan of procedure. As it is, you simply ramble along, at times seeming to follow a chronological plan (a day at the camp) and at other times departing from it.

You tend to tell rather than show. Some specific descriptive details would help.

This is a charming theme, showing both sincerity and sensitivity.

The theme weakens as it goes on. It should build up to some sort of conclusion and then stop. The last paragraph has little bearing on your title.

Comments to Teachers

I should pick out the chief weakness and help the student to overcome it. Don't worry about too many difficulties at once.

This theme is a glaring example of work by a student with limited vocabulary. Show the writer how this lack handicaps her. She needs work in vocabulary building.

This student has not been taught how to organize her ideas. She should be shown through the use of models how to choose a definite goal and make all her details contribute to its attainment.

I think that this student might profit from rewriting her theme. She has such excellent material and such a wholesome point of view that she could easily write a theme she could be proud of.

I am sure that the writer did not intend to give an impression of complacency in describing her relationship with the youngsters. Yet this is the impression that many readers will get from such sentences as "Some of these kids showed great talent. If someone would only cultivate it they could become as good as anyone." Or "I found that these kids have the ability to learn if they only have the chance." The note of surprise here, though unconscious, is almost as devastating as it is in some of Ring Lardner's short stories satirizing smug people. The student should be shown how she might make approximately the same points without creating an impression which she clearly does not intend.

THEME 12: COLLEGE OR A CAREER

Today every young person is faced with what seems, and is, a momentous decision. This decision is whether or not to go to college. Since delving into the problems of a boy in this situation would be too great a task, I shall attempt to air the problem only from a girl's standpoint.

Of course, many of us are also faced with the possibility of marriage, because those who have loved ones in the service want to follow them as much as possible. Yet those who do marry will have a similar problem, although they may have no other choice than to follow a vocation.

Now, should a girl graduating from the senior class of 1952 go to college or to work? First, let us consider the problem from an economic standpoint. Many girls harbor the belief that going to work immediately is much less extravagant than going to college. Even if they were to work there, the money would go only for their expenses, instead of contributing any capital toward savings. The minds of many girls, too, are swayed by what they hear of some factory worker earning so much more than a school teacher, personnel worker, or some other individual whose position would require a college education. It seems to me, however, that capital in the intellectual bank is worth far more than any savings of only material value.

Now let us consider the proposition from a cultural viewpoint. These four years, or more, spent in gaining priceless education would prove so very profitable in later years. This would be shown in the number and congeniality of friends gained, the favorable

opportunities for a vocation and then, simply, the self-satisfaction that one receives from having had the courage to spend a part of his life in a good college or university, no matter what obstacles he may have had to overcome.

To me, the arguments in favor of going to school so surpass those for not going, that I believe everyone who possibly can really should. Think what a better place this world would be in this, and succeeding generations, if everyone who had the opportunity would become a college graduate!

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Fair	Fair
Originality of treatment	Fair	Fair
Unity	Fair	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Fair
Paragraphing	Good	Good
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Fair	Good
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: C (2D, 12 C, 5 B, 2 A); by college teachers: C (1 D, 8 C, 5 B)

Comments to the Student

Since the second paragraph adds nothing to the theme, omit it and develop more fully the third and fourth.

Coherence would have been improved if you had adhered to your plan of considering only a girl's point of view. The generalizing in the last two paragraphs obscures the main issue.

Has it been your observation that the college graduates you know have more friends, opportunities, and self-satisfaction than non-graduates? Or is this idea just a theory we have come to accept?

In its execution this is a successful essay. That is, most of your words are carefully chosen, your sentences are clear and firm, and there are very few errors in mechanics. As an argument, however, the paper suffers from insufficient preliminary planning which has resulted in a lack of proportion in the finished product. Since you are writing a fairly brief paper, and since both your introduction and your economic argument against going to college are fairly full, you find yourself in a situation where you have to hurry over the heart of your paper, the argument for college. Thoughtful advance

planning would prevent your paper from bulging where it should be lean, and being lean where it should bulge.

Shouldn't you prove that "capital in the intellectual bank is worth far more than any savings of only material value"? What do you mean by "cultural viewpoint"? "congenial friends"?

Comments to Teachers

From the standpoint of mechanics, this composition is good. From the standpoint of convincing me that college attendance is preferable to going to work after graduation, it is not good. This student, like many others, is prone to making sweeping statements without backing them with proof.

This would be an excellent example to use in a discussion of organization.

I am not wholly averse to puncturing illusions (e.g., about education as salvation) in order to get students to do some independent thinking, instead of letting them mouth clichés, as most find it easier to do (adults included). Does she really think that "everyone" should go to college—mental defectives and other ineducables? (Some do!)

This student is able and glib. Give her tough problems and encourage her to be more colorful and vigorous in expression. Assign readings in the works of lively, pungent writers.

THEME 13: ORGANIZED CONFUSION

I awoke that morning to the hum and the honk of traffic beneath my window. I dressed and ate as I had every morning for the last year. Stumbling down the dark stairs I swung the door open to greet another day. The soft morning sunshine caused me to blink as I walked down the busy street toward the towering black "El" station. Dodging a pigeon, I climbed up the stairs carpeted with cigarette butts and broken whiskey bottles. I entered the crowded station and bought my ticket. Immediately I ducked outside to escape the screams of angry children and the booming of the loud speaker. I stood there with people brushing past me and trains whizzing by. Finally my train came snaking down the track and with a screeching of brakes, it halted before me. It yawned and I stepped aboard.

I swayed back into the car and threw myself into a dusty green seat. Suddenly a bell rang, and off we jerked. I sat there watching the back porches and trash littered lots whiz by. Even the sun didn't seem to reach these forbidden places. Often it halted at

stations and swallowed more people. Soon we burrowed underground into musty blackness. Lights flashed on and hand-holds sway in rhythm. The roar of the train drowned out all other noises. Suddenly the train squealed and scraped to a stop and vomited its load. I rushed off the train but halted in my tracks to gaze down at the poor begger. How ugly and cruel the city seemed. I forlornly scaled the stairs and stepped into the light and air. Beautiful sky scrapers ice-berged heavenward, illuminated by bright sun-shine. I then realized that there is real beauty in a big city.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Good	Good
Originality of treatment	Good	Good
Unity	Good	Fair
Coherence	Good	Fair
Emphasis	Good	Fair
Paragraphing	Good	Fair
Diction	Good	Good
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Good	Good
Spelling	Poor	Fair
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: B (7 C, 8 B, 6 A); by college teachers: B (6 C, 7 B, 1 A)

Comments to the Student

You have used effective details and effective language: "the stairs carpeted with cigarette butts," "train came snaking down the track," etc. Your choice of verbs is especially effective. Your theme is personal and individual. Be sure that the antecedent of each pronoun is clear—"Often it halted at stations." Keep tenses of verbs consistent. Don't make careless spelling errors.

Your selection of details and your choice of words are good; likewise good sentence transitions make for smooth reading. But I am disturbed by your sudden shift in emphasis from "organized confusion" to the "real beauty in a big city." In some way the reader should have been prepared for this shift. I am lowering your grade from B to C because of poor spelling.

The phrasing is remarkably original, but the many simple sentences detract much from the effect of the paper as a whole. Then, too, the climax isn't given enough emphasis to make it stand out above the accumulation of details that preceded it. Result: the reader is no more fully prepared for the final realization than you were!

Watch the physical point of view; the yawning, swallowing, etc. are from a point of view several hundred feet from the train, although you (the narrator) are in it.

Much of this is good. You do have a tendency to over-write at times; it is not necessary to make every verb a figure of speech.

Comments to Teachers

Here the problem is to teach the student some control without stunting a verbal exuberance which will be of value to him once he has learned to manage it. This might be done by discussing with him, in some detail, a couple of places where the diction he has chosen creates conflicting or uncertain impressions. For instance, in the fourth sentence, first paragraph, when the morning sunshine is described as "soft," the reader is poorly prepared for "to blink," which follows shortly thereafter.

This student will probably take good care of himself. All he needs is a sympathetic reader and some suggestions on technique. The excessive use of action verbs indicates that the student is amenable to suggestion; he has learned this device only too well.

A group of exercises in the integration of simple into compound sentences and complex sentences should aid the student to develop skill in using a variety of sentence types.

This essay has the life and movement for which one is always grateful. I suspect it is first-draft work. Suggest revisions be made before the papers are handed in. (This theme is good enough to merit considerable polishing.) Some papers must be revised, of course, after they are handed back—but teach students how much better it is for them to profit by their own revision before handing the papers in the first time.

This student has had such a good time picturing these events that his technical errors should be pointed out but not emphasized above the thought and feeling.

THEME 14: BEAUTY

What is beauty? Where do you find beauty? The word beauty is a short word, but it is a word whose meaning is very widespread. Look around you and you will see beauty. The trees, which stretch their limbs to the heavens, birds flying against a background of blue skies, the dainty flowers, and all nature itself are objects of beauty for they have been created by God whose love of beauty is profound.

Many things which are beautiful to some people are far from being that to others. The bustling, noisy city with its skyscrapers, streetcars, & factories may seem beautiful to a city-dweller, but to the farmer the smell of freshly mowed hay and the feel of newly plowed black rich soil to him are the most beautiful things in the world. The people of sunny Florida will argue that nowhere is there a climate comparable to their sunny skies, green palm trees, row upon row, and azure skies. But the residents of Maine and Vermont can boast of snow storms that create a world that is more beautiful and more magnificent than the imagination can perceive.

Beauty is seen in humans and animals as well as in nature. A beautiful woman is to be admired and perhaps envied. A person need not be beautiful from the standpoint of face, figure, or hair, but he, or she, may possess a radiant personality and kindness that are beautiful to all who know him. There is nothing finer to the eye of a horseman than to gaze upon a sleek, shiny, well-formed horse, or a litter of blue ribbon pigs to their owner.

There are some things which do not seem to have the merest qualifications for being classed as beautiful, but if one loves these things, they are beautiful to him. A baby's shrill cry as he gasps for his first breath of air may be, to some people, nothing but an annoying wail, but to the mother that cry is one of the most beautiful sounds she has ever heard.

One's home is still another place of beauty. Perhaps one has been on a vacation, traveling about and seeing some of the most beautiful spectacles the world has to offer. Yet, when he returns, his home will seem like a beautiful palace that far surpasses anything else he has seen.

These are only a few of the many many beautiful things which we have about us.

Evaluation

	<i>High school</i>	<i>College</i>
Quality of content	Good	Good
Originality of treatment	Fair	Fair
Unity	Good	Fair
Coherence	Fair	Fair
Emphasis	Fair	Fair
Paragraphing	Good	Good
Diction	Fair	Fair
Grammatical usage	Fair	Good
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: B (2 D, 8 C, 10 B, 1 A); by college teachers: B (1 D, 4 C, 8 B, 1 A)

Comments to the Student

You are to be congratulated in that you have found evidences of beauty in so many different situations in life, because beauty is important. You have made a good attempt at a definition of something that philosophers have had difficulty in defining. Would it be better if the situations were arranged in order of importance, working up to a climax? The ending is weak and lacks interest. I like that reference to a baby's cry. Expand the situations with more concrete details to help the reader. Sometimes you haven't really convinced me that beauty exists where you say it does. I believe, for instance, that you can develop more fully the "noisy city" and the "farmer."

Your title is too broad; it allows you to say anything you wish about beauty. Better, perhaps, would be "Beauty's Many Masks" or "The Relativity of Beauty." I think that you are trying to say two things—that beauty is relative and that beauty is everywhere. Development of one of these would have resulted in a better composition.

You would have strengthened your treatment if in your first paragraph you had given a clue to what was coming in later paragraphs. The second paragraph is best as far as parallelism, sentence structure, and images are concerned. After that, each paragraph becomes increasingly weaker until you have an extremely weak conclusion.

The theme indicates that you have done considerable thinking about the subject, and you seem to have the ability to describe accurately; however, it is hard to follow your ideas. Would not a better use of transitional words and connectives lead the reader from one thought to another more smoothly than you have done? Check on the use of participles. How about parallelism?

The subject is much too big, and perhaps too obvious. But you have found many details that are evidently interesting to you and that become interesting to the reader, too; and in a few words for each, you present them vividly. The concluding paragraphs are weak. Do you think that people should compete with horses and pigs for a beauty prize?

Comments to Teachers

Have the student determine his main idea, then test each paragraph in the light of the main idea. Have him study paragraph placement for logical development.

This is a challenging kind of student—one who writes with some fluency and dash, and who may be difficult to convince that

precision in syntax and diction is indispensable for good writing. Ask him to study and compare his final sentences of the third and fourth paragraphs, and he should see that, while the latter is a first-rate sentence, the former is ruined by the lack of parallelism. Ask him to look at the final sentence of the first paragraph and decide whether "all nature itself" belongs in the series of "objects of beauty." Ask him to justify "still another place" as a transitional phrase at the start of paragraph five. Challenge the use of "perceive" at the end of the second paragraph. He is intelligent enough so that he will soon get the point; he will see that his fluency frequently betrays him.

Avoid giving such general subjects for composition. Insist on careful planning. This rambles on. Urge students to work from observation and experience.

The theme shows effort and some mastery of form. It lacks depth, taste, humor, or maybe I should say balance. I should introduce the writer to Keats' "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," and have a personal interview trying to create greater depth of feeling. Praise will do more good than blame.

THEME 15: A SOLUTION FOR WORLD PEACE

During a period of less than thirty years, the United States has participated in two major wars. The First World War involved most of the nations of the North Atlantic. The Second World War affected all great nations.

One would think that, as a result of the terrible costs and distress of the First World War, man would not want to pass through this experience again. War has always been one of the greatest sources of suffering and misery for the human race.

Let us look at some of the causes of war. Commercial rivalries of great powers have been the basis of war. The desire of dictators to increase their power and prestige is also a cause of war. Disputes over trade problems, territories, and national boundaries have been the causes of war.

After the First World War, organizations for peace did not prove strong enough to avert the Second World War. After this War, the United Nations was established. It was a plan for world government, which supposedly was to be effective in bringing about world peace. It seeks to recognize individual rights throughout all nations and among all peoples, regardless of race, sex, language, or religion.

We must establish a government of justice in the world which will make extensive military training and the manufacture of war equipment unnecessary. Lasting peace is not an idle dream. Just because we haven't had it is no sign that it can't be obtained. Of course, as long as independent nations exist, there will be disputes, but they could be settled by means other than war. Today, if we as individuals have many disputes, we expect to settle them by peaceful means. This is what will have to be done in international affairs if the world is to usher in an era of permanent peace.

Today, with the atomic bomb and other mighty weapons, we should be convinced that further war is dangerous. This is why we should strive so earnestly for world peace. Modern society cannot afford war as a means of settling disputes. All men know this, and yet they have been unable to find the way to peace.

Since the Second World War, the United Nations has become a disputing and turbulent organization. Its members have many different viewpoints and are unable to give the world what it is craving for—lasting peace.

What *can* we, as a great nation, turn to in this age of turmoil? The answer is in a universal need of man, which can be met only by realizing the existence of something wiser and more powerful than man. If the nations of the world would but turn to Him for guidance, we would have a lasting world peace.

Evaluation

	High school	College
Quality of content	Good	Fair
Originality of treatment	Fair	Fair
Unity	Good	Fair
Coherence	Good	Poor
Emphasis	Good	Fair
Paragraphing	Good	Fair
Diction	Good	Good
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Good	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: B (1 D, 4 C, 9 B, 7 A) ; by college teachers: B-C (1 D, 6 C, 6 B, 1 A)

Comments to the Student

Too little attention to the solution. Paragraphs five and eight belong together. Put some emphasis on transitional devices.

You have really written two very good short essays here, but unfortunately you haven't quite been able to make them coalesce

into a single unified paper. During the first part of the paper you deal with the causes of war, finding them mainly in trade rivalry and dictatorial ambition. If these are the causes for the effect which you deplore, war, then in proposing a solution you must propose measures which would either remove these causes or control their operation in some way. However, when you come to propose your solution, you offer an answer which, admirable as it may be, you do not directly relate to the statement of causes earlier in the essay.

Your mechanics are better than your logic. Decide upon how many steps you plan to use in your solution. Then arrange them in some kind of order. Perhaps you could begin with the ideas most readily accepted by all and proceed logically to your own special point of view. Link these ideas together with proper transitional words or connectives. Then your ideas will flow along as they are read instead of appearing choppy and disconnected.

Comments to Teachers

An outline ought to help this student to observe coherence and proportion. He should also be warned about over-simplification in solving a problem.

This student is just at the point where he has something to say. The saying of it will be harder than all the rest put together, but a little encouragement ought to help.

This is a rather big assignment for a high school senior. After all, our diplomats haven't succeeded.

Do not ask adolescents to shoulder such tremendous problems. If they want to attempt it, insist on some limitation of the material to bring it down to the mental level of young people and tie it in with their first-hand experience. The little tensions and human frailties they can observe are, when magnified and nationalized, the real sources of war. Try to lead students out of the nebulous clouds of generalities in which this student is wandering.

I do not know of anything to do with over-ambitious students except to show them how much more they could say if only they would not try to say so much; a conference about the theme can be more helpful than written comments. I sometimes use a preliminary assignment requiring the students to find out how many theme subjects (or thesis sentences) they can find in some such vague title as this.

*I believe that most of us have more to learn from than we can teach this student. Of course, we might suggest such significant works as *Modern Man Is Obsolete*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, and*

The Magic Mountain as collateral reading, confident that this student will understand them.

This student writes with a note of personal conviction that more or less redeems the too-familiar material. But I grudge this B.

THEME 16: THE DESERTED FARM

The deserted farm is a sad and silent reminder of the gay and colorful life that once was within its gates. The ghostlike house with its shattered windows and sagging shutters stands forlorn. The broken steps and leaning porch pillars are mute evidence of its loneliness. The dilapidated house overlooks a weed and thorn infested barnyard, once noisy with the veryday hum of living. Its gates hang loose, the hingest having long since been destroyed by rust. The barn in the distance now leans precariously. The winter snows and summer storms have beat against it till its girders are bent as wheat in a field is bent by the summer breeze. No longer does the sound of children's voices ring gaily through the summer air. Only the wind through the trees breaks the stillness of the atmosphere.

Evaluation		
	High school	College
Quality of content	Good	Fair
Originality of treatment	Good	Fair
Unity	Good	Good
Coherence	Good	Good
Emphasis	Good	Good
Paragraphing	Good	Good
Diction	Good	Good
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Fair	Fair
Punctuation	Good	Good

Median grade given by high school teachers: B (4 C, 9 B, 8 A) ; by college teachers: B (1 E, 5 C, 5 B, 3 A) (The college teacher who gave the E explained that the theme is too brief to meet requirements of her college.)

Comments to the Student

You have succeeded in presenting the atmosphere effectively. I particularly like the first and last sentences.

Although you have misspelled words and have used too many subject-verb combinations to begin sentences, I like your theme. You have selected telling details for your picture, and the cadence of your prose helps to create the melancholy atmosphere of your deserted farm.

The picture would be clearer if we knew from what point of view the scene was being observed. And the only clue to the relations of the main elements of the picture is the phrase "in the distance."

You convey the intended impression so that the reader grasps it quite clearly. But of the nine sentences, seven are simple, two are complex, and none is compound: an effect of dull monotony is the result of such an array of similar structures. The spelling lapses also lessen the effect; rewrite each misspelled word correctly ten times.

Do you have in mind a real house that you have seen? This is the usual picture of a deserted farm; it needs special details to individualize the place.

Comments to Teachers

On the basis of this brief sample, it's difficult to tell how sure a sense of language this student has. Despite the monotony of the syntax, the sentences show some feeling for prose rhythm, and at least three of the sentences employ constructions which unskilled writers are not likely to use. Also, the writer's diction at times is felicitous, and at other times slides over into cliché: "mute evidence," "the everyday hum of living," "children's voices ring gaily." These tendencies toward slackness in diction and sentence structure are not seriously disturbing, but they are strong enough so that words of caution would not be misplaced.

See that this student does more sustained and purposeful writing at least occasionally. Refuse to accept the idealized and idyllic as a substitute for authentic observation. Encourage the use of original figures of speech.

Suggest careful proofreading. Each student should have his own dictionary available.

In making an assignment for this kind of writing, we might forewarn the class against the trite, conventional picture by reading a "horrible example," and then reading a description that is more interestingly developed, with details that bring it to life.

THEME 17: MY DARKEST HOURS

For weeks I had planned on taking my 4-H steer to the State Fair. Actually, it hadn't been weeks; it had been years, especially this last year. Finally it had narrowed down to months of training, feeding, currying, and watchful care, then weeks of preparation and now days weighted with anticipation.

I had been rushing around all day making a list of things I had to do, checking them off and adding others. When I paused for a moment, I glanced at my watch and saw it was time to feed my calves.

As I went down the feed-way aisle feeding my prizes, I was happily day-dreaming about the fun I would be having in a few days. When I came to Chang, my best calf, I froze in horror at what I saw. His eye . . . his eye!

"Oh, no it just couldn't be! I must be seeing wrong for no *good* God would let such a thing happen!"

Instantaneously all of my years of dreams and hope shattered, for it looked as if Chang had been blinded in his right eye, the death blow to a show animal.

I tried to calm myself, but chills ran through me. I walked over, held Chang's head and made a closer observation. Weakly I groped for the railing, moving mechanically out into the evening breeze, and sank to the ground.

With Daddy and Mother away for the week I had no one to advise me on what to do. Pulling up snatches of grass, I sat trying to think, slowly coming out of my daze. I finally decided to go see a veterinarian living twenty miles away, who seemed to be the most confident. Although I doubted if Daddy would have readily consented, had he been there, I thought that would have been his final decision.

When I got to the veterinarian's all of the lights were out. It was only nine o'clock; surely he wouldn't be in bed already. Deafening howls from the vet's dog kennels began the minute I slammed the car door and increased in volume until by the time I reached the house, I half expected to be shot as a burglar.

I knocked and knocked but no one answered the door. Well, if he weren't home, I decided I'd wait until he came. At last I saw a light coming through the house. When the doctor answered the door I told him I thought Chang had snagged his eye on a nail or barbed wire. He said there was a very slim possibility that Chang could have snagged the tissue in his eyelid instead of the eyeball itself, and he would come the next day, for a staggering fee, and see what he could do.

The next evening as I watched the vet carefully inspect the injury I held my breath. It seemed to me that after I had waited and waited to know something, until it seemed impossible to stand the suspense, I found when the long awaited moment arrived, that I was afraid to learn the truth and would have preferred to wait a little longer.

After what seemed like hours he drew from his bag a dangerous looking instrument and deftly clipped away the eyelid tissue, which had been unexplainably torn.

All of my past hours of torture were ended in a split second, as quickly as they had begun, but I had lived a year in those hours.

Evaluation

	High school	College
Quality of content	Good	Good
Originality of treatment	Good	Good
Unity	Good	Good
Coherence	Good	Good
Emphasis	Good	Good
Paragraphing	Good	Fair
Diction	Good	Fair
Grammatical usage	Good	Good
Sentence structure	Fair	Fair
Spelling	Good	Good
Punctuation	Fair	Fair

Median grade given by high school teachers: B (2 C, 11 B, 8 A); by college teachers: B (5 C, 6 B, 3 A)

Comments to the Student

You kept me in suspense until I came to the last sentence. You made me realize how much work goes into producing a show animal for a State Fair. I am giving you a grade of A in spite of the fact that you have omitted some commas—but please be more careful next time. Correct the awkward expressions that I have checked.

I can share your feeling. You have selected good details to present the feeling ("pulling up snatches of grass"). You plunged right into the narrative, kept us in suspense, and plunged right out—good. Would conversation add to the interest? You need to review paragraphing and revise yours. What is the effect of over-frequent paragraph divisions? Is your second sentence clear?

Some of your sentences are a bit awkward. Polish and perfect them in future compositions. Avoid extravagant expressions like "all my years of dreams and hopes," "my past hours of torture," "I had lived a year in those hours."

The beginning of the theme is slow—perhaps it could be shortened; the ending is hurried and requires filling out.

Comments to Teachers

Let the student grow by assigning provocative reading and letting him take part in discussing it.

This above-average paper raises a problem that most of us find peculiarly troublesome: What can we say to a student who, in narrating an event that has obviously moved him deeply, falls into clichés that threaten the effect he seeks? The student, deeply stirred, resorts to the stock language of cheap fiction or soap opera, and we get expressions like "I froze in horror" or ejaculations like "Oh, no it just couldn't be!" How can this tendency to pump up emotion be controlled without seeming to impugn the student's sincerity? I would not comment on these matters directly on the paper, since they are difficult to explain summarily, but in a conference I would try to thresh out the problem thoroughly, suggesting that hackneyed language, however forceful it may appear, cannot convey an impression of sincere feeling.

THEME 18: APRIL SHOWER

The red brick street lifts her finger to her lips, and the screaming neighborhood is hushed. As the sky frowns in wrinkles of gray, wet clouds, darkness swoops down on the silent street. At first blobs of water plop at spaced intervals; then the whole sky explodes in a cymbal crash and bass drum roll. As in Ravel's "Bolero," the repeated rhythm rises in crescendo and acceleration to a pulsating frenzy.

The lilacs bend their dusty heads, crushed by the beating beads of water, while muddy torrents gush down the gutters and carry the dirt away. Only the fresh and clean—the pure, damp air, the yellow-green grass, the rosy bricks, the fragrant, glistening lilacs—are left to sparkle in the squinting sun.

Evaluation

(Marked *Good* in all categories by both high school and college teachers)

Median grade given by high school teachers: A (1 E, 3 C, 4 B, 13 A); by college teachers: B (1 E, 1 D, 4 C, 2 B, 6 A) (The high school teacher who marked the theme E did so because she considered it forced and insincere; the college teacher considered it too brief for credit in her college.)

Comments to the Student

I enjoyed this very much: the analogy, the description of the lilacs and of the coming and going of the shower. I wonder whether the "crushed by the beating beads of water" isn't over-writing. Beads hardly suggest "beating." The picture of the lilacs at the last seems to me almost a contradiction of the "crushed" state.

This has its moments. Your "gush down the gutter" is good. But don't overdo it. The blobs of water don't plop "at spaced intervals."

The scene is well visualized and in several places you have found exactly the right words and images for the picture. "Wrinkles" of clouds and "the squinting sun" are new to me, and effective. I cannot see a street lifting a finger to its lips, though, and I don't know why the neighborhood should scream. The transition from storm to sunlight is too sudden; a phrase or sentence is needed to prepare the reader.

Comments to Teachers

The teacher of writing has an unusual responsibility to the student who can handle descriptive prose as surely as this writer. This kind of student—imaginative, word-conscious, perhaps impatient of routine—is likely to interpret ordinary expository and argumentative assignments as opportunities for achieving stylistic tours de force; whatever the assignment may be, in his hands it will turn out description or narration, regardless of how appropriate these forms may be for the problem. The teacher must be patient with this tendency, which is often the sign of an adventurous writer, but the teacher must also, with firmness and tact, see to it that the student has experience with, and achieves skill in, more straightforward and "ordinary" kinds of writing.

A study of Huck Finn's down-to-earth figures of speech might help students who are interested in improving their style but who strain too hard for effects.

Try writing from observation for greater accuracy.

THEME 19: THE CLERGYMAN

There is a widely held misapprehension that a clergyman, somehow, is different from other people. Well, in a sense he is. He is a man devoted to a particular way of life, a man called upon to minister in the sacred situations of human experience. But he is not so completely a member of a third sex as some people think.

If one meets a man on the train and he says that he is a traveling salesman or a lawyer, his reaction is usually one of at least casual interest, and nothing has blocked the flow of conversation. But if a man says, "I am a clergyman," the conversation is never quite the same. It is remarkable how many people will act like a small boy just before Christmas.

Some people try to steer the conversation into what seem appropriate channels for a man of the cloth. Miraculous answers to prayer are related; or unaccountable superhuman happenings, which so many people associate with religion. The most common remark is, "Now I don't know much about religion, but here is the way it seems to me." Then follows a series of childish observations which he would be ashamed to make in any field but religion.

Many people feel that they must explain why they have not been to church lately. They assume that the clergyman is vitally interested in hearing long-drawn-out reasons which often reflect considerable ingenuity. He must listen with a straight face. Through the whole process he knows that the reason they have not been to church is that they do not think the church is very important. The Church can get along very well without the person who feels he is bestowing a favor when he attends.

One of the most disturbing things to the preacher is the assumption that he lives quite safe from the lusts of the flesh and the more refined evils of the spirit. Yet, the preachers go to the public schools and attend American colleges. They are not inoculated against temptation. They do not wear halos and they do not marry angels, except in the poetic sense. They have to earn their livings, provide for their old age, and pay their bills. They do not dwell on the mountaintop and send down their wisdom to the people. They are the heads of institutions and they have to work with committees and boards.

The next time you meet a clergyman, don't act as if he is someone to be afraid of, talk to him as you would a man of any other profession. It will make him feel better, as well as yourself.

Evaluation

(Marked *Good* in all categories by both high school and college teachers)

Median grade given by high school teachers: A (10 B, 11 A); by college teachers: B (1 E, 2 C, 5 B, 6 A) (The person who gave the theme an E said that it sounds as if it may have been plagiarized, although he has no idea of the source. If he is right, and the theme is plagiarized, he has this advice for teachers: "Assuming that this paper consists of unacknowledged quotation and close paraphrase, I should try to convince the student that he has misrepresented himself and that turning in such a theme is not criminal but silly. If the theme is original, it would be worth an A.")

Comments to the Student

Your theme shows thoughtful observation. You do not indicate the antecedents of the pronouns in the first sentence of paragraph two or the last sentence of paragraph three. The last

sentence of paragraph four uses a singular noun while the rest of the paragraph uses the plural for nouns and pronouns.

You are to be congratulated. This paper is a superior job in every important respect; it conveys an interesting and clearcut idea, it has maturity of tone, and it moves smoothly and naturally from point to point. The only weak place in the paper may appear so only because the rest of it is so apt. I refer to the concluding paragraph, where the lapse into direct advice-giving seems to me out of keeping with the rest of the paper. You have made your point so admirably that this hammering home of the lesson is inappropriate.

Comments to Teachers

The mistakes here are the kind that the ear might catch before the eye would. Suggest to students that they read their papers aloud.

Because of the level of sophistication at which this student writes, his teacher's chief task may be to help him locate subjects which will fully test and extend his powers. Direct comment on his work, probably, will be confined to fairly subtle though important points, such as the shift in tone in the last paragraph or such verbal relaxations as the use of "process" in the middle of the fourth paragraph.

THEME 20: DESTINY'S DISPLACED PERSON

Eustacia Vye possessed a beauty of color and limb that was unequalled by any woman around her. Her tall, straight figure was soft to the touch; her dark flaming eyes matched the glorious silken hair that crowned her head. Even in a more populated region than Egdon Heath, Eustacia's appearance would have been judged as striking.

Thomas Hardy, the author, said Eustacia was the raw material of a divinity. She possessed the instincts and passions of a model goddess. Her striking appearance made a suitable background for the exotic desires she had. The wrath and fire of Eustacia's soul were balanced by a dignity and triumph in her bearing. Selfish, irresponsible, and discontented, Eustacia was used as a plaything of Destiny which was governed by love and passion. Entirely unfamiliar to her was a love such as Venn had for Thomasin: undemanding, free from the selfishness of his desires.

Fate introduced Clym Yeobright, an enchanting newcomer from the world Eustacia dreamed of, to the Heath. If Eustacia had

been endowed with the gift of contentment know to Clym, she would have led an ordinary but worthwhile life. As she was, she disliked the near, liked the far, and was enchanted by the extraordinary. "Do I embrace a cloud of common fog?" were her words when Wildeve said he cared for her and would take her away from Egdon Heath. Eustacia realized her passion for Wildeve was a volatile thing. It was humiliating to have him when Thomasin no longer wanted him.

Fate had placed Eustacia not in her enchanting Paris, or even in Budmouth, but on lonely Egdon Heath. She hated the heath-folk and all man-kind. Clym once told her there was no use in hating human beings. Rather, she should hate what produced them. She replied, "Do you mean Nature? I hate her already." The Heath, loved dearly by Clym, was, to Eustacia, "... my cross, my shame, and will be my death."

Eustacia did not bother to rebel against human beings, for there were no figures on Egdon Heath important enough to incur her wrath. Mankind as a whole might have been blamed for her life on the Heath, but she felt Destiny was responsible for her unfortunate placing. Eustacia told Venn though there was a beauty in the Heath, it was a jail to her. She resigned herself to whatever was in store for her. She felt her actions were inconsequential and would have no bearing on a final outcome, so she lived with few cares and customs.

The loneliness of the heath and her hatred of it intensified her one desire; a consuming love. Her desire was not for any special lover but rather for one of such personality that she could be entirely absorbed by him; (if not for a lasting time, a brief romance would do). A passionate love, soon lost, was more desirable to Eustacia than a lifetime of congenial companionship.

The foreordained future, in Eustacia's mind, could not be altered. It would bring the passionate love of youth she desired and which would fade as time went on. Reality of the future was an element avoided by Eustacia: "I dread to think of anything beyond the present. What is, we know."

Since Eustacia's great desire for love was slow in coming to her, she turned to other fields of interest. Though she disliked the heath-folk, she associated with them to please herself. Eustacia told Clym she went mumming "... to get excitement and shake off depression." The cause of her depression was stated simply as "Life."

Eustacia was a pitiable figure. Her spirit was finally broken by her unhappiness. Though she had yearned to be a great woman,

Destiny had dealt her a cruel blow by placing her in Egdon Heath. It was as if a judgment had been placed upon her, discernible to the heath-folk as well as to herself. At first she tried to "... look with indifference upon the cruel satires that Fate loves to indulge in," but this was finally changed to a bitter revolt against fate. Things beyond the control of mankind twist many good intentions. Whatever great dreams Eustacia might have had, Destiny had given her an unfortunate lot.

Evaluation

(Marked *Good* in all categories by both high school and college teachers)

Median grade given by high school teachers: A (1 C, 2 B, 18 A); by college teachers: A (1 C, 4 B, 9 A)

Comments to the Student

You have exceptional ideas and exceptional sentence structure. You have made excellent use of quotations, showing a good understanding of the novel. Your opening and closing paragraphs are excellent.

Instead of using "so" as a connective between clauses, begin your sentence with a subordinate conjunction ("because") and omit the "so."

The chief way in which the sketch could have been made even better would have been by giving greater attention to the demands of coherence, by seeing to it that your statements flow naturally and clearly from sentence to sentence, from paragraph to paragraph. For instance, midway in the second paragraph, your series "selfish, irresponsible, and discontented" hits the reader with an excessively abrupt thud after your previous build-up of Eustacia.

This is a thoughtful study. The chief weakness is a tendency to break the unity of one section by admitting ideas adequately discussed elsewhere. To avoid this, outline your compositions and put ideas in proper compartments.

Comments to Teachers

We find this sort of writing so rarely that most of us are inclined to overrate it when we do—we are so much impressed by splendor formae that we overlook the fact that the substance of the paper is almost entirely derivative. This student should be encouraged to expound his own conceptions, to work toward his own imaginative reconstruction of experience.

As a subject, offer some challenging questions that can't be answered just by repeating what the novel says, though quotations are acceptable when used to support a writer's opinion. I have made such a list of topics and questions for this novel and have used it with good results.

This student is so promising that a teacher ought to spend some time discussing with him some fairly subtle questions of coherence; e.g., should the material in paragraph three have been held until later in the theme? Equally suitable choices in diction could profitably be discussed. In what sense, for example, does he use "matched" in the second sentence? In the seventh paragraph what does he mean by "reality of the future"? Finally, we must remember that even good writers are stimulated by compliment. I would compliment this writer for maintaining a pleasantly discursive tone, instead of the schematized enumeration of "traits" which often passes for a character sketch.

The author of this theme is evidently a lover of literature. She should be encouraged to read and to write. (She probably will become a teacher of English!)